



Resistance in Psychotherapy

Allison Felton, MD

**Assistant Professor, University
of Missouri-Columbia School of
Medicine**




Sources of Resistance

- **Patient originated**
- **Therapist originated**
- **Social network originated**



Patient Variables

- **Readiness to Change**
- **Lack of Information**
- **Fears associated with change**
- **Dysfunctional patterns expressing themselves during therapy**
- **Transference**



Patient Originated Resistance

- **The Usual Response to fear is what?**



Psychotherapy/ Pharmacotherapy

- **Patient unsure of taking a medication**
- **Recognition of pattern of fear when patient taking on anything new**
- **Interpretation of patients fears in regards to medication**
- **Recognition of patterns inv**



Patient Originated

- **Lack of insight-can't identify feelings or recognize patterns**
- **Dysfunctional patterns (fear of criticism, not doing homework perfectly)**
- **The pain of where they are is NOT greater than the pain of change**



Therapist Variables

- **Inappropriate expectations of patient**
- **Lack of skills or lack of skills that fit with patient**
- **Poor explanation of homework**
- **Working toward the wrong goals**
- **Countertransference**



Social Network Variables

- **Criticism of patient being in therapy**
- **Upsetting the equilibrium of the social network**
- **When one member of a unit changes others are changed whether they like it or not**



Recognition of Resistance-Therapist

- **Frustration or discomfort**



Expectation of Resistance

- **Need to understand various forms of resistance in relationship to stage of psychotherapy**



Engagement Stage- Forms of Resistance

- **Difficulty with trusting the therapist**
- **Doubting the effectiveness of therapy**
- **DNKA**
- **Patient criticizing therapist**



Pattern Search Stage- Forms of Resistance

- **Failure to report information relevant to defining patterns as seen by:**
 - silence**
 - defensiveness**
 - lying**
 - not doing homework**
 - talking about irrelevant topics**



Homework



Change stage- Forms of Resistance

- **Failure to generate alternatives as evidenced by:**
 - agree to try to generate new pattern but fail to do so**
 - refusal to comply with therapists suggestions**
 - discuss termination before changing**



Termination Stage- Forms of Resistance

- **Fail to terminate therapy such as:**
 - continuing to call therapist**
 - fear of loss of therapist means return of symptoms**



Confronting Resistance- Therapist's Role

- **Identification of resistance**
- **Contemplate origins**
- **Is this an example of a maladaptive pattern?**
- **Why am I so frustrated with this?**
- **What is motivating this person to respond in a self defeating way?**
- **Am I expecting too much from this patient?**
- **Did I explain exercises thoroughly?**
- **Does patient understand?**



Confronting Resistance

- **Therapist's need to look at their own expectations of the patient keeping in mind:**
 - 1. patient's readiness to change,**
 - 2. their degree of fear**
 - 3. social network support,**
 - 4. patient's functioning level**



Beginning Therapists

- **Use of poor interventions**
- **Knowledge base**
- **Unrealistic expectations**



Social Network

- **Friends drink-have to find new social interests or friends**
- **Woman develops chronic illness-father of children resistant to taking more responsibility**
- **Husband stops drinking-wife can no longer blame his drinking for her lack of desire for intimacy**



Stages of Psychotherapy
